

(Intro Slide)



This message is NOT for folks who are happy being couch-potatoes, just sitting around while the world is falling apart around them.

-- It is not for people who are complacent, self-satisfied, coasting, dis-engaged, who really don't care.

TR: This message is for those who ache to be in the game.



Not everyone on the bench wants to be called to go in by the coach.

-- Some don't even know what the score is.

-- Some have to check their shirts to remember what team they play for.

TR: No, our study in the OT book of Nehemiah is for those who

. . .



. . . eagerly raise their hands . . . saying, “Pick me. Pick me. I want to go in. I’m believe I’m called to more than just riding the bench.”

-- Some of us are doing OK in life, but there is something in us that knows there has to more.

-- And that “more” is not just more stuff, more fun, more relaxation.

-- It is “more” of what matters. It is the stuff of the Kingdom of God.

TR: Nehemiah’s hand was up. He had a comfortable position working for the King of Persia. Sure, he had to test the wine to make sure it wasn’t poisoned. But he also seemed to be in charge of setting up the security protocols to make sure it wasn’t an elixir of death . . . neither for himself or the king.

NOV-DEC 446 BC

. . . that Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem.

ESV

Turn with me to Nehemiah chapter 1, page 438 in the handout Bibles

-- I'd like to read through most of chapter 1 and then on to chapter 2:8.

-- Some sections of this book were written by Nehemiah; the final edit probably by same person who edited Ezra.

READ SLIDE

-- P.T. Forsyth: We can be praying towards Jerusalem or towards Babylon. Cf. seeking first the kingdom of God or all the other things.

-- Nehemiah wanted to know the status of things with the

people of God in the promised place of God.

-- And when he heard it he reacted like he was saying, "The status quo, it's got to go!"

TR: Continue in verse 3

Nehemiah 1:3

And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is **in great trouble and shame**. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire."

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: Verse 4

Nehemiah 1:4-5

As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.
5And I said, "O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments,

ESV

READ SLIDE (verse 4)

-- Nehemiah understood that without a wall and sturdy gates, anyone in Jerusalem were easy pickings for marauders and enemies.

-- Moved by their trouble and their shame, his response was to weep, mourn, fast, and pray.

-- His prayer begins . . . **READ SLIDE (verse 5)**

-- How does God ultimately make covenant with us today?

Through the blood of the ultimate Sacrifice, the One to Whom all the other animal sacrifices pointed. To Jesus.

-- For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son . . .

TR: and then continues . . .

Nehemiah 1:6

. . . let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, **which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned.**

ESV

READ SLIDE

- day and night
- confession for sins

TR: This admission of guilt continues . . .

Nehemiah 1:7-8a

We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses.
⁸Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying,

ESV

READ SLIDE (verse 7)

**-- And then Nehemiah's prayer asks God to remember . . .
READ SLIDE (verse 8a)**

TR: Specifically . . .

Nehemiah 1:8b-9

“If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, ⁹but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.”

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: Appealing to the God who keeps covenant and HESED, that is, covenant-faithful love, Nehemiah continues . . .

Nehemiah 1:10

“They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand.”

ESV

... by appealing to what God has already done ... READ SLIDE

TR: And then, at the end of chapter 1, the prayer of night and day for four months, changes into a prayer for the moment God called Nehemiah to more ... to get off the bench and into the game.

Nehemiah 1:10

"O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, **and give success to your servant today**, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."
Now I was cupbearer to the king.

ESV

READ SLIDE

-- Note the change to a specific for this special moment . . .
"give success to your servant today . . ."

TR: We know the season of fasting and prayer went on for four months by the date markers in the first verses of each chapter.

Nehemiah 2:1b-2

APR-MAY 445 BC

. . . I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. ²And the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart." Then I was very much afraid.

ESV

Chapter 1 began in Nov-Dec and now chapter two picks up four months or so later, in Apr-May.

-- READ SLIDE

-- A direct approach would have been foolish, but to change his countenance before the king was still risky.

-- Sadness in the king's presence was grounds for death.

-- The adrenalin was pumping. This was the moment he had prayed for and yet it also felt so overwhelmingly scary.

TR: But Nehemiah's time of prayer and planning . . . his practice time, if you would, made him ready to be called to more.

Nehemiah 2:3-4

I said to the king, "Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, **the place of my fathers' graves**, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?"
4Then the king said to me, "What are you requesting?" **So I prayed to the God of heaven.**

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Talks to King Artaxerxes in terms that he could identify with. Honoring the graves of ancestors would have been important to him.
- Then the question . . . "For what are you asking?"
- Nehemiah prays some more . . . as someone said, "Four months and 4 seconds of prayer"

TR: And then this "aww, aww, send me in" guy shared what is a thought out plan . . .

Nehemiah 2:5

And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it."

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: A plan that was thought out . . .

Nehemiah 2:6

And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), "How long will you be gone, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time.

ESV

READ SLIDE

- Obviously, the way Nehemiah did his work made him valuable to the king.
- And it disposed the monarchs to grant his request.

TR: But he knew he needed to ask for even more if he was to be successful.

Nehemiah 2:7

And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah,

ESV

READ SLIDE

TR: So, Nehemiah asked for safe passage and . . .

Nehemiah 2:8

and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress of the temple, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy." **And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.**

ESV

READ SLIDE

- so he asked for safety and supplies.
- This was no small request . . . and the king granted it to him.
- Why?
- Was it because the king appreciated him? Thought he was a good worker? Because he connected his request to the shared values of the king? Because he had a specific plan? Yes and no . . . ultimately it was because . . .
- . . . "For the good hand of my God was upon me."
- God answers Nehemiah's prayers, but there are no overt miracles in the entire book.

TR: Let's ponder this account and ask, "What can we learn from Nehemiah?"

**WHAT CAN WE LEARN
FROM NEHEMIAH?**

- ☐ *The call is not **just** for prophets & priests.*

First, we can learn that . . . READ SLIDE

- The Hebrew Scriptures, what we call our Old Testament, were divided into three sections: The Law, The Prophets, and The Writings.**
- Like Daniel, whose account taught us how to Make the Most of Every Opportunity in a pagan land . . .**
- . . . Nehemiah was not a prophet or a priest. They both worked for a foreign government.**
- It is easy to think that “the call to more” is only for pastors or missionaries. **
- And, it is true that without a clear call from God, most folks who enter vocational ministry don’t last.**
- But ALL of us need to INTENTIONALLY MAKE THE MOST.**
- God wants us all to be called to see what COULD be and what SHOULD be. (A. Stanley)**

-- Don't you want the next chapter in your life to be doing MORE . . . to be doing what is best for the Kingdom of God?

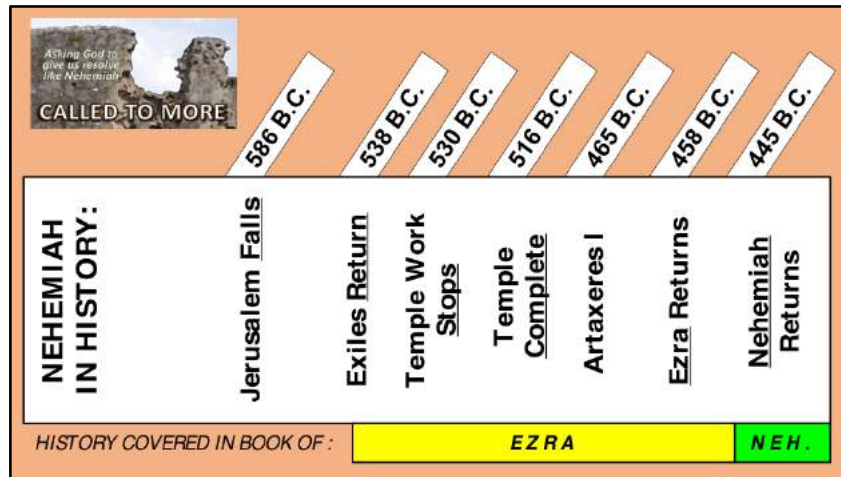
TR: We can also learn that . . .

**WHAT CAN WE LEARN
FROM NEHEMIAH?**

- ☐ *The call is not **just** for prophets & priests.*
- ☐ *It takes **time** to gain clarity and then execute.*

. . . READ SLIDE

TR: It helps to gain an overall picture of the time-frame of history around this book.



READ SLIDE

- 538 = Decree by Cyrus
- Nehemiah, according to chapter 5:14, ended up being governor of Jerusalem and environs from 445 to 433.
- That's 12 years.
- And we already saw that it was 4 months from 1:1 to 2:1.
- It takes time to gain clarity on the vision God has for us . . . and time to execute it into reality.
- We are called to a “long obedience in the same direction” (E. Peterson)

TR: We also can learn that . . .

**WHAT CAN WE LEARN
FROM NEHEMIAH?**

- ❑ *This is history & an example for us.*

. . . READ SLIDE

-- As the NT says, looking back to the OT - 'Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. ' 1 Corinthians 10:6

-- We won't find a lot of prescriptive teaching here. Most of it is descriptive. But examples really help, don't they?

-- EX: Principles of EOS then shown in example of the entire novel that shows how a consultant applied it to a particular company.

TR: Finally we can learn what I learned last time I preached through Nehemiah eleven years ago . . .

**WHAT CAN WE LEARN
FROM NEHEMIAH?**

- ☐ *This is history & an **example** for us.*
- ☐ *Vision is conceived out of **pain**, developed through **prayer**, and birthed after waiting for God's timing.*

READ SLIDE

- Conceived out of pain: "I sat down and wept"
- Developed through prayer: 4 months of praying.
- Birthed after waiting for God's timing: Change in prayer from someday to today.

TR: These are things we COULD learn, but if we individually don't take the effort to ask ourselves some soul-searching questions, we probably won't REALLY learn anything. So, WHAT MUST WE ASK OURSELVES?

WHAT MUST WE ASK OURSELVES?

- ☐ *Will I **care** enough to ask and really listen?*

READ SLIDE

- “Does anyone really care?”
- “The worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them; that’s the essence of inhumanity.” (Wiersbe)
- Do we care enough to ask about and really listen to the state of other people’s souls?
- Do we care enough to get a hold of our missionaries prayer letters and know what’s happening in their lives?
- Do we care enough?

TR: On the heels of that question comes this one . . .

WHAT MUST WE ASK OURSELVES?

- ☐ *Will I **care** enough to ask and really listen?*
- ☐ *Will I let myself be **broken** for what breaks God's heart?*

. . . READ SLIDE

- It is so easy to be broken for our own pain.**
- cf. my pain and how it easily consumed me, even though it was nothing compared to what so many go through.**
- But, the question is "what breaks God's heart?"**
- Isn't it people who have never heard and seen the Gospel lived out?**
- Isn't it people who claim to be in a covenant relationship with Him but live like their lord is Lucifer himself. They have been duped and deceived. Like sheep without a shepherd.**
- There are so many things . . . but in essence it is when people are outside of the Kingdom of God.**

TR: As we ask these two questions, inquiries into our hearts and where we will be willing to be hurt or hurt again, our

hands begin to go up when we move to the third reflection point . . .

WHAT MUST WE ASK OURSELVES?

- ☐ *Will I **care** enough to ask and really listen?*
- ☐ *Will I let myself be **broken** for what breaks God's heart?*
- ☐ *Will I go beyond emotion to serious **prayer** & even **fasting**?*

READ SLIDE

-- Emotions are important, but people who are **SEEKING THE CALL TO MORE**, realize that any vision of what they are to do with the next chapter of their lives must be clarified and confirmed by God Himself.

-- I repeat the thought of a few minutes ago . . . too many of us pray facing Babylon and not Jerusalem. For us, in this New Covenant era of the Holy Spirit, it is towards the New Jerusalem we studied about in the book of Revelation.

-- Fasting is never commanded in the Bible, but Jesus said that when He left this earth that His disciples would fast. Fasting is tied in the Bible to being penitent for our sins **AND** in times when it is critical that we hear God's calling and leading in our lives.

-- If you've never fasted as a follower of Jesus, why not?

TR: And as we pray, note the example Nehemiah leaves for us in this next question.

WHAT MUST WE ASK OURSELVES?

- ☐ *Will I accept responsibility for my actions & **inaction**, individually & as a community?*

READ SLIDE

- Think back to the confession of sin beginning at the end of verse 6
- “confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned.”
- When we ask God to put us in the game, and call us to more, we first need to have our hearts broken.
- We need to sit down and weep.
- Not just for the sad state of affairs of the world or of God's people.
- But, for the blame that belongs on the salt and light God has left in this world to preserve what is good in His creation.
- It is too easy to blame church leaders, or divisive people, or druggies, or liberals, or Make America Great Again conservatives. But the state of our country is MY fault.

-- Perhaps not by my sinful actions. But, certainly by my sinful inaction.

-- I am part of the body of Christ. There is one team in the Kingdom of God. And we all bear accountability and responsibility.

TR: Accepting this responsibility as we pray and even fast is hard. So we must ask ourselves . . .

WHAT MUST WE ASK OURSELVES?

- ☐ *Will I accept responsibility for my actions & **inaction**, individually & as a community?*
- ☐ *Will I **persist** in prayer as I make **plans**?*

READ SLIDE

-- Four months for Nehemiah.

-- 35 years for me, asking God for revival. Asking Him to make clear what plans He wants me to make so that when the time is right, we can jump off the bench courageously and together, with energy and joy, and win!

-- EX: Pastors' prayer this week: Group meeting monthly at Fellowship Church to pray. Usually last Thursday of the month at 7:00.

TR: The call to more will come for those who persist. Yet, even then we face a last question.

WHAT MUST WE ASK OURSELVES?

- ☐ *Will I accept responsibility for my actions & **inaction**, individually & as a community?*
- ☐ *Will I **persist** in prayer as I make **plans**?*
- ☐ *Will I take the risk when “someday” becomes **“today?”***

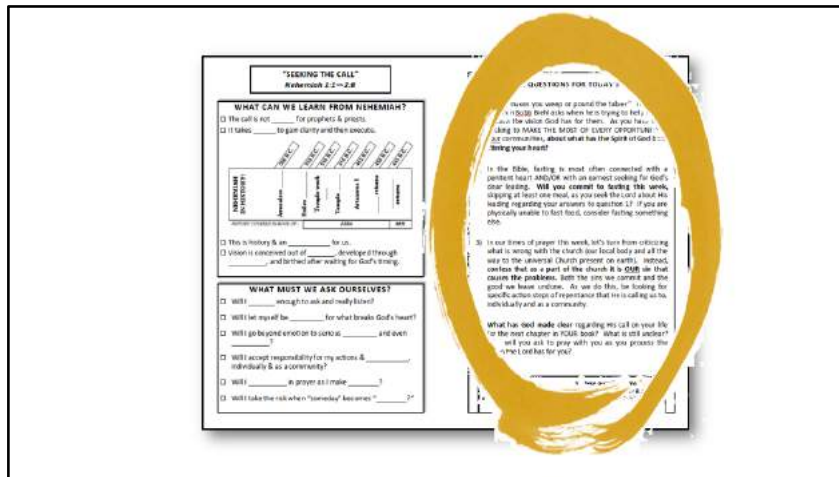
READ SLIDE

- Nehemiah's four months turned into TODAY turned into four sections of in-his-heart prayer.
- All the praying didn't take away his fear.
- What God will call us to do, individually and together, will probably scare the willies out of us.
- The challenge of actually beginning . . . stepping up . . . saying, “Here am I, send me in!” will still loom before us.

- Today's message for us is not done . . . not until we take the time to wait before God and actually ask ourselves to call us to more.
- Cf. “Good sermon, pastor” versus “Last week was used to change me.”
- cf. my motivation to prepare a new workbook and training

for conflict mediation. “That was great” but then not do it.

TR: If we are to actually have ears to hear today, we must take time to reflect . . .



In your worship flier, on the facing page, the reflection questions can help.

-- Will you ask God to make clear what makes you weep?

About what has He been stirring your heart as you've been praying for your communities?

-- Will you fast? At least one meal. Preferably one 24 hour day. Perhaps more. Will you thus say to God that hearing His clear leading is so important, that you agree "man does not live on bread alone"?

-- Will you confess and repent, for your sins of action or inaction? And for your guilt as part of the one body called the church? Beginning with our local church and then considering even broader than that?

TR: And then will you let me know?

"SEEKING THE CALL"
Rehearsal 2.2-4.2.8

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM NEMEMAH?

1) The call is not _____ for prophets & priests.

2) It takes _____ to gain clarity and then execute.

WHAT MUST WE ASK OURSELVES?

1) Will _____ enough to ask and really listen?

2) Will I let myself be _____ for what breaks God's heart?

3) Will I go beyond emotion to know _____ and own _____?

4) Will I accept responsibility for my actions & _____ individually & as a community?

5) Will _____ in prayer as I realize _____?

6) Will I take the risk when "community" becomes _____?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR TODAY'S TEACHING:

1) "What makes you weep or grieve the table?" That's the question God asks when He's trying to help us move closer to the vision God has for them. As you have been seeking to MAKE THE BEST OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY in your community, what has been the light of God been shining your heart?

2) In the Bible, fasting is most often connected with a penitent heart. ANDREW with an earnest seeking for God's clear leading. Will you commit to fasting this week, starting at least one meal as you seek the Lord about His leading regarding your answers to question 1? If you are physically unable to fast then, consider fasting something else.

3) In our times of prayer the week, let's turn from coloring what is wrong with the church (our local body and all the way to the universal Church present on earth). Instead, confess that as a part of the church it is OUR sin that causes the problems. Both the sin we commit and the good we have undone. As we do this, let fasting for specific acts of repentance that we are calling us to, individually and as a community.

4) What has God made clear regarding my call on your life for the next chapter in "GOD'S WORK"? What is still unclear? Who is _____ your journey? Share _____

I cannot claim to have your answers to these questions. What I can't do is simply give you all the answers. All we can do is pray for a leading of the Holy Spirit. And we can do this together. - Pastor Doug

I believe God has been showing me over my sabbatical time what breaks His heart.

-- I think I understand what is keeping the oft-prayed for revival at bay.

-- I know I have wept. I know I must fast more.

-- But I also need to hear from you.

-- I've learned that what God is saying to you is often a corrective or a clarifier or a confirmation of what I believe He has been leading me to, as I've been waiting on Him.

-- How sad it would be if no one emails me the results of their waiting on God . . .



**. . . it would be like this were a photograph of us in our seats . .
. bored and just hoping that the soccer mom brought good
snacks.**

**-- We are called to be more than couch-potatoes, aren't we?
-- God is calling us to MORE so we can make the MOST.**